

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

COMMITTEES:
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
RANKING MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS
ARMED SERVICES
SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON AGING

September 8, 2010

The Honorable Raymond L. LaHood, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I am writing in support of Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER II) grant applications submitted by the Maine Department of Transportation for the Aroostook Railroad Preservation and Rehabilitation Project. This project is vital to northern Maine's economic viability and stability.

The State of Maine is currently negotiating with Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway (MMA) to acquire 233 miles of rail line in Aroostook and northern Penobscot counties, which MMA seeks to abandon. Maintaining the operability of this rail line is critical to the economic viability of the region, as the line is Northern Maine's sole link to the national rail network.

Currently, the unemployment rate in Aroostook County is 10.3 percent, more than two percentage points higher than the unemployment rate statewide. Without effective rail service, Aroostook County's unemployment rate will only worsen. In fact, the Northern Maine Development Commission estimates that as many as 1,726 direct and indirect jobs are tied to the area's rail line. The lack of rail service would hinder future economic development by discouraging new business growth and hampering the continued operation and growth of current employers. It is clear that rail service must continue to play a vital role in the economic viability of the region, long into the future, and this is the State's goal in acquiring the line.

In June, Maine citizens supported providing sufficient taxpayer dollars for the state's purchase of the rail line. Following the purchase, the State intends to contract with a private company to operate the line. However, sections of the existing track are in poor condition and require significant repair. Speed restrictions currently exist over these sections of the line, slowing shipping and hurting area industry.

The State is seeking \$10.5 million in TIGER funding to provide for the rehabilitation of the deteriorating sections of track. Bringing this track into a state of good repair will help increase freight haulage speed and capacity, and allow Maine-based industries to better compete in national and global markets.

I also support Maine DOT's grant request for \$275,000 for planning and development of the northern Maine rail corridor. The funding, including \$125,000 in matching funds, would enable the State and area stakeholders to identify and address community and regional challenges within the rail corridor. The information secured by an organized planning effort will



allow stakeholders to work to increase the utilization of the railroad line, ultimately increasing revenue and service. Business owners have told me that they would use the rail system more, if conditions and services were improved. These planning funds would focus the improvements necessary to revitalize rail in northern Maine to the benefit of our state's economy.

The proposals presented by Maine DOT reflect a commitment to job retention, job creation and improving the economic vitality of northern Maine. It is with this in mind that I lend my strong support to these requests. I ask that you please give these applications every consideration, subject to all applicable laws and regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Susan Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" and last name "Collins" clearly distinguishable.

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator